

Chair Eklund, Vice Chair Manning, Ranking Minority Member Thomas, and the members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, my name is Leah White and I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act.

I believe my religious freedoms will not be infringed upon if the LGBTQ community are also a protected group. My personal experience as a religious conservative contributes to my commitment to empower the LGBT community. This bill would allow for the LGBT individual to pursue their own goals and fight the discrimination they may face in the future.

Religion is already a protected group which stems back to when our nation's ancestors came to this land searching for religious freedom. Our ancestors wanted to escape religious persecutions to follow the dictates of their own conscience. As a result, I am free to live as a conservative Christian today. I am able to pursue my own goals. However, my Ohio LGBTQ neighbors do not have these same freedoms that I am afforded. It would be like if someone took offense to the cross I wear and decided I would not be allowed to have my job, home, goods and services. Our nation's ancestors faced this when they were told the ways they lived went against God. They were able to come to this land and enjoy their freedoms. Yet, where are our Ohio LGBTQ neighbors' freedoms? I believe the role of government is to provide people the necessary freedoms to pursue their own goals. How can the LGBTQ community pursue their own goals if they cannot legally stand up to the discrimination they face?

God said, that one of the greatest commandments is to "love your neighbor" like the Samaritan did for a man who believed he was a dissenter. I do not have to agree with my neighbor to support them. I no longer want to walk past my LGBTQ neighbors. There are too many stories of discrimination that describe how they have been pushed into problematic situations. I believe in helping this community become self-reliant. For this reason, please ensure the dignity and worth of each person by empowering the individual in pursuit of their own goals through passing this bill.

I urge you to pass Senate Bill 11, the Ohio Fairness Act. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.